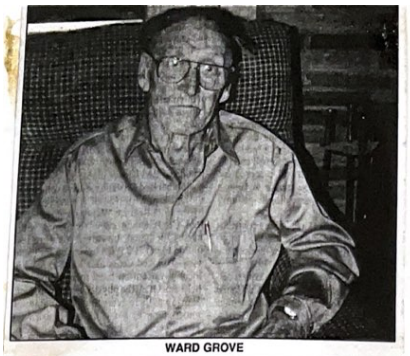

WARD GROVE

Ward Grove

The small airport he began in Camas' Fern Prairie area still carries the name, spirit of local aviation pioneer

By SANDRA WALTERS
The Post-Record

The name Ward Grove has become well-known in the field of aviation.

Grove, who Grove Field is named after in Fern Prairie, worked for several years to build up the airport in the community north of Camas.

Grove's connection to the airport began years before he found the spot to construct an airfield in the Camas-Washougal area.

Grove, born May 17, 1910, in Bucoda, Wash., first came to the Vancouver area in 1924 from Woodland, with his mother, Gertrude, after his father died.

It was while living in Vancouver that his love for flying machines grew and he began taking flying lessons at Pearson Airpark.

"I was 18 when I first learned to fly," Grove, who died Aug. 31, 1993, recalled during an interview in May 1993 with the Post-Record. "I always wanted to fly."

On Jan. 1, 1934, Grove married his wife, Kessie, who now resides at Highland Terrace Nursing Center in Camas. In order to pay for her husband's flight instruction, Kessie worked nights at a dance club.

In the May interview, Grove recalled in 1937 that he experienced two big moments in aviation history that occurred in the Vancouver area.

First, he saw Charles Lindbergh land on Swan Island in a replica of the plane he made history in when he made his transatlantic flight.

The second episode Grove witnessed occurred when he and Kessie were returning home from North Bonneville, and saw the trans-polar USSR Chkalov flight land at Pearson Airpark.

Grove said in the May interview his love of aircraft continued to grow and in 1945 he and Kessie cashed in their war bonds and bought 15 acres in Fern Prairie to start an airport.

During his ownership of the airport, Grove trained war veterans, using the G.I. bill, to become pilots. To provide for better training, Grove extended the runway from 1,650 to 2,400 feet, after purchasing an additional 5.3 acres.

In 1962, the Port of Camas-Washougal purchased the landing strip at the airport and in 1978 the entire airport.

Grove worked as a flight instructor until 1975, and resided on the property as caretaker, in the house he and his wife built, until his decline in health.

While still in good health, the couple took a trip to California to attend the Tex Rankin reunion, which honored one of the Northwest's most famous aviation pioneers. The trip for the Groves was paid for by the C-W Aviation Association.

In late May 1993, Grove was presented with a plaque for his long-term commitment to the community and aviation.

Tina Goodnight, a member of the C-W Aviation Association, said in the May 1993 interview that the group, as well as the Camas-Washougal Port, wanted to show Grove their appreciation for all his hard work at Grove Field, which was officially named after him in 1984.

"We want to recognize him for his long-term commitment to the community and to aviation," Goodnight said. "He is a legacy to area aviation."

Grove was a member of the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers Union, OX5 Aviation Pioneers, Fraternal Order of the Eagles and the Northwest Antique Airplanes Club.